

7/16/2009 Farmers Should Farm, Not FDA

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House Bill Would Substitute Bureaucratic Red Tape for Farmer Know-How

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Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, here we go again--yet another attempt to expand the power of the federal government and to intrude further in America's business. Just like with cap-and-trade, which was forced upon Members without proper consideration, here comes another bill from the Energy and Commerce Committee. This time it is H.R. 2749, the Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009.

I believe our nation has the safest food supply system in the world, and I also agree that we should continue to examine that supply system to make certain that we continue to improve upon it. However, H.R. 2749 will not make us a better food safety country. Instead, it will expand the federal bureaucracy, and it will impose unnecessary costs on a struggling ag economy. This legislation represents a dramatic shift in federal policy that could, just like cap-and-trade, devastate agriculture.

This legislation was considered by the Energy and Commerce Committee just a couple of weeks ago. Now, just like cap-and-trade, the Democratic leadership wants to bypass the expertise of the Committee on Agriculture and bring this bill to the floor, this time under a suspension of the rules--no further consideration, no markups by other committees of jurisdiction, no amendments, just a vote.

One provision of H.R. 2749 that is of particular concern is section 103. This section would require the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to set on-farm performance standards. For the first time, we would have the federal government telling our farmers and ranchers how to grow crops and raise livestock.

The cultivation of crops and the production of food animals is an immensely complex endeavor involving a vast range of processes. We raise a multitude of crops and livestock in numerous regions, using various production methods. Imagine if the government is allowed to dictate how all of that is done. Chaos will ensue. Unfortunately, that is what H.R. 2749 allows.

Those who have never been on a farm will be allowed to tell a producer how to conduct his or her operations. We will not improve food safety by allowing the Food and Drug Administration to tell our farmers what to do. We will improve food safety by allowing farmers and ranchers to do something that they and their ancestors have been doing for generations.

There are other problems with this bill as well--new penalties, recordkeeping requirements, traceability, registration mandates, user fees--all things that do nothing to prevent food-borne diseases and outbreaks but that do plenty to keep regulators busy and that increase costs.

I raised these concerns today in a hearing of the House Agriculture Committee, which was reviewing food safety. The witnesses representing the FDA tried to reassure the committee by telling us not to worry, that they knew what they were doing and that they would consult with the Department of Agriculture. However, the FDA has no expertise in crop and livestock production practices, and I have little confidence that the FDA will work with the USDA.

In fact, a recent example of the FDA's unwillingness to accept the expertise of the USDA was demonstrated this week. It involved another bill, H.R. 1549, which would restrict--in fact, eliminate--the use of animal antibiotics. H.R. 1549 would institute a ban on the non-therapeutic uses of antibiotics, which is another ill-conceived concept concerning a very complex issue. Yet we learned today that no consultation by the FDA has occurred with the USDA.

In a hearing earlier this week before the House Rules Committee, the FDA suddenly shifted its course and supported this ban. No new research or scientific analysis was presented. Again, apparently no consultation with the USDA occurred. So much for collaborating with the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, we must stop rushing legislation through Congress without careful, thoughtful and complete consideration. Congress rarely gets things right when we have ample time to properly consider policy changes, but it never makes good decisions when rushed by arbitrary timetables. H.R. 2749 needs to be referred to the Committee on Agriculture to allow for necessary improvements to this food safety bill, improvements which will actually improve the food safety of our country and will not shut down agriculture.

We do not need FDA from farm to fork.